**Staying Calm Under Pressure**

*By Jennifer Fisher Bryant*

***Place-kicker Gary Anderson’s tips for performing at your best.***

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| **Gary Anderson is one of the most successful kickers in NFL history.** |

The game is nearly over—only two minutes remain. Players from both football teams line up on either side of the thirty-yard line. Ten yards away, place-kicker Gary Anderson of the Minnesota Vikings is waiting for the ball to be snapped. This is the last game of the regular season, and his performance could clinch a playoff spot for his team. Even so, he’s relaxed, focused on the spot where his teammate will place the ball. The crowd yells. The noise is deafening, but Anderson remains calm, intent on his job.

The center snaps the ball. It’s a good hold. Anderson takes two quick steps and kicks the ball. It sails through the center of the uprights. The referees signal—it’s GOOD! The Vikings have earned a spot in the playoffs.

“This guy is dynamite,” said Mike Morris, another Vikings player. “I haven’t seen him miss one yet.” In fact, Anderson did not miss a single field goal or extra point during the entire 1998-1999 regular season. He also led the league in total points scored and broke the NFL record for career field goals.

But even Anderson has had his share of missed kicks. Sometimes, even though he prepares for a kick properly, it just doesn’t go through. That’s what happened in a 1998-1999 playoff game. “I kicked it like I kick every other one,” Anderson said. “But it just didn’t go through. That is the way kicking goes. . . .”

Unfortunately, this first missed kick of the year was a big miss. The game went into overtime and the Vikings lost. They didn’t go to the Super Bowl.

Without a doubt, Anderson’s position as a place-kicker is one of the most stressful jobs in professional sports. It is “all or nothing” when he walks onto the field. Games can be won or lost by a fraction of an inch, within a period of two or three seconds.

How does he handle the pressure? Anderson takes the mental aspect of his position as seriously as the physical aspect. “I practice hard and consistently,” he says. “In the big games, experience helps a great deal. Once you’ve handled challenges successfully—whether it’s in sports or any other form of competition—you gain confidence. When the pressure’s on again, you can draw on that success and stay relaxed.”

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| **Gary Anderson’s Advice for Young Athletes** |
| Work hard in practice. |
| Visualize success. Imagine yourself scoring a goal, winning the race, or completing a pass. |
| Don’t dwell on past failures. Try to improve for next time. |
| Don’t expect to win 100 percent of the time. When you lose, don’t make excuses. Make it a learning experience. |
| Most importantly, have fun! Every sport requires skill and self-discipline, but you should enjoy playing, too. That’s really what sports are all about. |

1. Which of the following sentences from the article explains how Anderson handles pressure?
2. “I practice hard and consistently,” he says.
3. It is “all or nothing” when he walks onto the field.
4. Anderson takes two quick steps and kicks the ball.
5. The noise is deafening, but Anderson remains calm, intent on his job.
6. Which detail from the article shows that Anderson is a successful NFL kicker?
7. Anderson had a very stressful job.
8. Anderson helped his team make it to the Super Bowl.
9. Anderson missed a kick in the 1998-1999 playoff game.
10. Anderson made every kick during the 1998-1999 regular season.
11. Which sentence BEST explains the main idea of the article?
12. Practice is the most important part of playing sports.
13. Winning is important if you are a professional athlete.
14. To perform your best, it is important to remain relaxed.
15. Working together as a team helps you succeed in sports.
16. According to the article, which event happened BEFORE the Vikings earned a playoff spot, but AFTER the players lined up on the thirty-yard line?
17. Anderson misses a field goal.
18. Anderson makes a winning field goal.
19. Anderson practices kicking field goals.
20. Anderson breaks the NFL record for field goals.
21. According to the article, what happens AFTER the Vikings last regular season game?
22. The Vikings try to improve.
23. The Vikings go to the playoffs.
24. The Vikings find a new kicker.
25. The Vikings earn a championship.
26. Read the sentences from the article.

**Games can be won or lost by a fraction of an inch, within a period of two or three seconds.**

Which sentence below uses the word *period* the same way it is used in the sentence above?

1. The period between breakfast and lunch seems to take so long when I am hungry.
2. My teacher always reminds me to put a period at the end of a sentence.
3. The hockey team played well and scored two goals in the first period.
4. I cannot wait to go to science class during sixth period.
5. According to the chart, what should you do if you lose a game?
6. feel bad about not winning
7. blame others and make excuses
8. try to improve for the next game
9. imagine yourself being successful
10. During the regular season game, the crowd is yelling because
11. Anderson’s kick was good.
12. the Vikings won the Super Bowl.
13. the Vikings were playing in Minnesota.
14. Anderson’s kick would send the Vikings to the playoffs.
15. The author includes the chart to
16. describe positive sportsmanship.
17. teach the skill of field goal kicking.
18. inform coaches about running a practice.
19. list ways to stay relaxed during competition.
20. Which word BEST describes Anderson’s personality?
21. athletic
22. determined
23. hopeful
24. young

Answer Key:

1. Correct Answer is A, DOK 1
2. Correct Answer is D, DOK 2
3. Correct Answer is C, DOK 2
4. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2
5. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2
6. Correct Answer is A, DOK 3
7. Correct Answer is C, DOK 1
8. Correct Answer is D, DOK 3
9. Correct Answer is A, DOK 2
10. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2